

Mr. EDWARDS of Texas. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. OBEY. Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee do now rise.

The motion was agreed to.

Accordingly, the Committee rose; and the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. BISHOP of Georgia) having assumed the chair, Mr. POMEROY, Chairman of the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, reported that that Committee, having had under consideration the bill (H.R. 6599) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes, had come to no resolution thereon.

REPORT ON RESOLUTION PROVIDING FOR PROCEEDINGS DURING THE PERIOD FROM AUGUST 1, 2008, THROUGH SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

Mr. MCGOVERN, from the Committee on Rules, submitted a privileged report (Rept. No. 110-816) on the resolution (H. Res. 1399) providing for proceedings during the period from August 1, 2008, through September 4, 2008, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2009

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 1384 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill, H.R. 6599.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for the further consideration of the bill (H.R. 6599) making appropriations for military construction, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, and for other purposes, with Mr. POMEROY in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. When the Committee of the Whole rose earlier today, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. EDWARDS) had 14½ minutes remaining and the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. WAMP) had 30 minutes remaining.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee.

Mr. WAMP. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Chairman, oftentimes in life it's more important what you do with your second chances than what you do the first time around. Neither Chairman EDWARDS, who spoke so eloquently in a comprehensive way about this bill and his commitment to our veterans, our men and women in harm's way and their families—neither he nor I took

advantage in our younger years of serving in the uniform of our Armed Forces. However, fate has it that we would have a second opportunity to serve by serving those who are serving us, past and present, through this bill; making sure that those great American patriots, past and present, have what they need—and are entitled to and deserve because of their commitment to this great Nation.

It is the highest compliment of my professional life to serve as the ranking member of this subcommittee. I want to thank Chairman LEWIS—former Chairman LEWIS, now Ranking Member LEWIS—for this privilege because without him and his support I wouldn't be here. I want to thank Mr. WICKER, who was the ranking member of this subcommittee last year, and I want to thank whoever helped him become a Senator to open up this subcommittee opportunity for me, and for Chairman EDWARDS, who, as you just saw on the House floor, is a class act, with a true commitment to the men and women in uniform and a determination to do whatever is necessary to honor their commitment.

And I can report today, as I did at the full committee, that when I go home and people ask me in 2008, in my new position, are we honoring our Nation's veterans and the men and women in uniform serving in an asymmetrical war on two fronts in Iraq and Afghanistan, with head trauma and IED injuries and amputations—double, triple, extraordinary injuries—stress from unfair deployments, unsustainable deployments, stress on the family, are we honoring our commitment to them? And I don't think a few years ago, regardless of party, that the answer to that question was yes. We had problems at Walter Reed, we had problems at Fort Stewart, we had problems across the board.

We still have many challenges. The deployment ratios have got to continue to improve. But I can tell you in this bill there is a bipartisan commitment to honor their commitment. And I believe we are making great progress at ensuring our men and women in uniform and their families have what they need and deserve, and when they come home as veterans, that we take adequate care of them—not adequate, but responsible care of them. And I think we're making great progress.

I want to thank the majority for doing something that people in the hinterland wouldn't even understand, but they put the Military Construction bill back in with the Veterans bill where it belongs. When I served on the subcommittee 10 years ago, this was not the case.

But when the Military Construction bill funds quality of life needs and child care centers and polytrauma centers and housing needs, the veterans piece being in with it in the same bill allows the continuum of care to come together so that we can look at the whole picture from today's men and

women in harm's way and what their quality of life needs are—which is number one for us—all the way through the end of their life as a veteran with our VA system. It needs to all be together.

That was an amazing success, bringing Military Construction and Veteran's Care back together—my hat's off to the Speaker for doing that, first and foremost, for Chairman EDWARDS for his leadership, and for Chairman OBEY for his commitment.

I do agree that over the 100 hearing hours Chairman EDWARDS and I had a hands-on with these amazing Americans, we produced a work product, this bill—at roughly \$48 billion for the VA and \$25 billion for the military construction needs around the world—that is very strong, and an encouragement to all those in harm's way today and those that have been in harm's way in the past.

I will say that the President's budget request for veterans was a record level. Now, the chairman said that it wasn't enough, and I agree with that. And we did increase it by \$3 billion, but it was at a record level. So today there is an encouraging bipartisan proliferation to see who can do more for our Nation's veterans. And that's a good thing for our Nation's veterans, that we're in competition to see who can do more for the men and women coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan and those that have served in the past.

But I was blown away over the last few months with the quality of the servicemembers and veterans. First, we hear from the chiefs of the respective services, the top enlisted personnel, the commanders from around the world, like the Commander of CENTCOM, who is now General Petraeus, with two wars under his command in Iraq and Afghanistan, we hear from all these leaders about the needs on the ground and what investments they need the Congress to make for them to do their job successfully. And then from the military families, that talk about the stress felt when we had a 15-month in, 1 year out deployment, now it's back to 1-1, it's going to 2-1. We need to get to 3-1 to make it sustainable, meaning 1 year in theater fighting, 3 years back in a noncombat station. This is so important that we work towards these objectives and that we honor this commitment.

Now, on the subcommittee, we've got extraordinary support. Former chairman of the full committee, who will speak in a minute, BILL YOUNG from Florida, sits with us every hearing, hands on, fully engaged. ANDER CRENSHAW from Jacksonville, Florida, who will also speak, JOHN CARTER, from Texas, KAY GRANGER from Texas on the Republican side. I want to compliment not just Chairman EDWARDS, but SAM FARR, the vice chairman; who was really engaged, and a man who understands the world; he does an outstanding job.

You mentioned all the staff, I won't repeat their names, but both sides of